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KYRGYZ REPUBLIC

SUCCESS STORY

New Dance

The USAID-funded CDI Small Grants Program supports youth initiatives in the area of development, healthy lifestyle and information dissemination



Gulzada Yryspek kyzy dances to a song dedicated to Kyrgyzstan at the opening of the CDI Youth Workshop.

Gulzada Yryspek kyzy is a lovely and cheerful 15 year old girl who displayed her initiative and talents in sewing and dancing through the USAID-funded Collaborative Development Initiative (CDI) Small Grants Program.

Handicraft classes are among the few non-academic courses in Kyrgyzstan schools meant to provide pupils with practical life skills. Handicraft lessons in Gulzada's school in Karavan village mostly focus on sewing. However, due to the absence of equipment girls learn only theories and do not gain hands-on sewing skills. In September 2007 CDI launched the Small Grants Program through which CDI, in collaboration with local NGOs and school administrations, enables young people to undertake initiatives that develop vocational and entrepreneurship skills.

"We especially wanted to make Kyrgyz dresses," says Gulzada who had to rent national outfits every time she performed ethnic dances. Being the member of the CDI Youth Initiative Group she initiated the formation of a sewing group with 14 other high school girls and sought assistance from CDI.

To the girls' great joy their idea was welcomed. Two handicraft teachers agreed to coach them as the girls apply their theoretical knowledge in sewing; the school principal provided a room and materials and CDI purchased several different types of sewing machines. Since January 2008 Gulzada and her teammates have been spending a few hours in their workshop everyday after school, making pillows and curtains and decorating them with Kyrgyz ornaments which they sell at the local market on Sundays. All the profit they have generated so far will be used to purchase fabrics and accessories to make the national outfits which they will soon start tailoring.

The girls named their mini studio *Arzu*, or Dream, representing their dream to make national apparel and demonstrate the beauty of Kyrgyz dance.

Mercy Corps, March 2007